

Factsheet About The Book *Communion With Christ* and the *Journey Discipleship* Launch

So I've got this book in my hand, *Communion With Christ*. What is it for?

This book is the "roadmap" we've created to accompany the launch of a new ministry of discipleship here at BridgeWay we're calling the *Journey*. **The launch will take place as a 3-month test-run in our Life Groups between now and December.**

A year ago, we did a summer *Book-of-the-Quarter* on discipleship. We were burdened by the fact that there were too many people in the church who had been Christians ten or fifteen years, but honestly had not grown much in their faith, and were struggling with basic spiritual disciplines.

We knew we had to do better. In the class, we agreed that there were certain things that a new believer ought to learn very early in their faith journey. So we identified all those things. Things like: learning about the supremacy of Christ and how to grow in their relationship with him. They should also learn about the centrality of the gospel, and how to share the gospel with others, along with basic evangelism skills. They should learn the importance of Scripture as our authority for life, and be taught how to read it for themselves in daily quiet times. And how to pray. And how to overcome sin and grow in holiness. And how to serve. And the importance of fellowship.

For the past six months or so, I have been taking all this data and writing it out in an organized fashion. With the roadmap in hand, we can now begin practicing discipleship at a deeper level.

Why should older believers work through *Communion With Christ*? Isn't it primarily for new believers?

Not necessarily. The goal of our discipleship is lifelong growth in Christ. Here are three considerations:

- 1) The disciplines and doctrines taught in Book 1 are generally considered "foundational" teachings. Yet as we already said, many were never taught these things early on, and so struggle with them years later in their faith journey. By bringing the entire congregation through this book, **a baseline of discipleship is established** for the church that will make it stronger moving forward (Hebrews 5:12).
- 2) Established believers will disciple younger believers in future *Journey* groups, so working through these materials will help train them for those future interactions (2 Timothy 2:2).
- 3) It is never wasted time to refresh one's knowledge of the life-giving practices of our faith. Repetition and reminders are invaluable for our continued growth (Philippians 3:1).

What is unique about the *Journey* discipleship process?

1. Its 3-Fold Target. Most discipleship plans focus almost entirely on teaching knowledge, which is certainly necessary for growth, but incomplete if it doesn't lead to growth in serving, sharing, and holiness also. The *Journey* is not just another Bible study. We've identified three growth targets that must always remain in our line of sight – Knowledge, Fruitfulness, and Christlikeness – then designed hands-on exercises to promote growth in these areas (Colossians 1:9-10).

2. Its relational process. Discipleship in most churches takes place in a classroom. Jesus taught the masses in large group settings for sure, but he *trained* the Twelve by pulling them away from the large group. Then he discipled Peter, James, and John by pulling them aside from the Twelve. Both the large group and the small group are necessary for healthy fellowship, but deep-level discipleship can only take place in *smaller* small groups of 2 to 4 people, of the same gender, because it allows for an honest sharing and accountability not possible in the other settings. The *Journey* will be experienced in these groups of 2-4 people.

3. Its promotion of lifelong growth. Once the training books in the *Journey* series are completed, the journey of growth shouldn't stop. *Journey* meetings are built around heart-level sharing of the disciple's growth in Knowledge, Fruitfulness, and Christlikeness. There is never a time in a person's life when he or she should stop growing in these areas, so there is never a time when they don't need the prayer and support of other brothers and sisters.

The *Journey* ministry is meant to take place ideally in groups of 2-4 people, but we're starting out by using it in our Life Groups. Why?

Few of us have been involved in a true "triad" (what BW has called groups like this before). And forming them comes with challenges, since ideally, it should happen organically and not be forced. So starting the *Journey* in our Life Groups will allow as many of our people as possible a chance to take it for a "test-drive".

Even in a Life Group setting, we can still practice breaking up into the smaller groups for some of the work. The hope would be that by the time this 3-month experience ends, some *Journey* groups will naturally spin-off in a Spirit-led fashion and continue meeting. Other groups may need some nurturing to come to birth, which we'll provide as needed.

So what's the plan?

Between now and Christmas, we want our Life Groups to go through 3 sessions of *Communion With Christ*. There is more than enough material in each session to cover 3-4 weeks of meetings. After the 3-month experience ends, our hope is for formal *Journey* groups to begin meeting in the new year and finish the book's remaining sessions by next summer (meeting once a month.)

In a healthy spiritual rhythm, we see our discipleship groups as part of a 3-legged stool of fellowship, made up of Sunday worship, Life Groups (3 times a month), and a *Journey* get-together (once a month.) It's assumed that there will be periodic check-ins with each other throughout the month for encouragement, prayer, and fun. Something else that's important: **As groups form, we want to be intentional about bringing together younger and older believers.**

All the nuts and bolts of the *Journey* ministry are described in the two "*Getting Started*" introductions of the book. On your own, we want you to carefully read through both of these introductions to get a feel for this ministry. There's no need to spend an entire Life Group meeting discussing the introduction material, except to make sure "everyone's on board" with the concepts. We'd rather you just dive in to one of the sessions.

Which sessions should we cover?

The book is divided into three basic sections: Sessions 1 to 3 cover the doctrine of Christ and how to have a relationship with him. Sessions 4 to 6 cover the Bible, and how to read it for yourself. Sessions 7 to 9 cover the practice of prayer.

Over the last few months, we've released a couple sessions to the church as they were written to give you a feel for the materials, which some of our groups have covered.

With this in mind, for this 3-month experience, it would be my recommendation that our groups work on sessions 7 through 9 about prayer. This will make sure that everyone is working with new material. More importantly, my heart is so burdened right now for BridgeWay that we begin to flex our prayer muscles and grow stronger in this spiritual discipline.

Then when we launch the formal *Journey* groups in January, we can go back and cover sessions 1 to 6.

Having said this, if you're browsing through the book and everyone in the group says, "I'd love to cover the Jesus section", or "I'm really struggling with my Bible reading," then go with God. The book does not need to be covered in order.

How should we break out each session's work in our Life Group's meetings?

Each session/chapter in the book is broken out similarly. It begins with an essay that sets the theme for the lesson. Then there is a section called "*Training Work*" where exercises and projects are given to work on the 3 Targets. Under the "Knowledge" section, a Bible book (or books) are assigned, along with a small memory project. Under the "Fruitfulness" section are exercises to work on for growing in evangelism and servanthood. Under the "Christlikeness" section are exercises to grow in prayer, and a final section that allows for heart-level sharing.

So here is how in a month's worth of meetings you could break that out:

Week 1: Discuss the devotional. Use the discussion questions that are provided, or add your own. There is plenty of material to dig deep with.

Each session of the book ends with a section labeled "Share Your Heart And Pray For Each Other".

Many sessions end with the chart that is given on pages 40-41. (Carefully study the chart, and also read through the commentary provided about the chart). For your sharing and prayer time at the end of each meeting, you can do what you ordinarily do in your Life Group. But at least half of the time in this 3-month period, we want you to break up into same gender groups of 2 to 4 people, find space for private sharing, and run the questions with each other that are in the chart, then pray for each other. (You'll want to put time boundaries around this exercise, maybe 15-20 minutes.)

Week 2: Discuss the Bible reading project and memory work. For session 7, you're to read through *Romans*. Which means there should be plenty of material to fill the evening! End the session as we described above.

Week 3: Discuss and work on the "Fruitfulness" and "Christlikeness" exercises for the session. There is a "Sharing Your Faith" exercise, a "Serving" exercise and a "Prayer" exercise. Note: For this session to work well, it will be important for group members to be working on the exercises a full week or two

before this meeting, so that everyone can share their experiences. End the meeting with sharing and prayer, as in earlier weeks.

Week 4: Devote it to any extra “left-over” work from the prior session, or move on to the next session.

Follow the pattern: Devotional one week, Scripture reading the second week, Exercises the third week, wash, rinse, repeat.

Read the book of Romans?! That’s a lot of reading!

From one angle, yes. From another angle, no. We’ve just conditioned ourselves to think so. Read through both of the book’s *Getting Started* introductions where we explain why this is our approach. There’s a method to our madness here.

The questions in the chart – they’re pretty deep. This seems challenging to me.

This type of sharing is challenging for most of us. There’ll be a learning curve with this. Read through the commentary on pages 40-41 which talks about this. And also read through what we say about it on pages 110-111. Be encouraged by what Scripture tells us, *“Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” (James 5:16).*

A few final notes:

This book and the concepts behind it have drawn the interest of other churches and groups outside our orbit. It is our intent to reach out with these materials and let others know about it. Pray for the outreach work we’ll be doing.

The book is well-edited and “clean”, but there’s a good chance that a few typos might be hiding out. If you find any, please shoot me a note with the page number. The publishing technology we’re using allows for an edit-as-you-go approach. We still want to do a bit of reformatting, and resizing of charts.

Speaking of charts, we’ll be working on setting up a *Journey* page and portal on our website, that over time, will offer additional discipleship resources.

If you would like to reach out to your orbit of influence and help spread the word about *Communion With Christ*, please do so. It’s [now available on Amazon](#).

This is the first book in what we plan to be a 4-book series. But this is most important one, because it sets the disciple up for lifelong growth if they continue to practice the habits taught in the book. Next summer would be a reasonable target date for completing *Book 2: Connection To Community*.

Any questions at all, reach out.

Serving with you,

Pastor Bear